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UNCLAS ALMATY 001721

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CACEN (JMUDGE), EUR/RPM, DRL/PHD (PDAVIS)

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [KZ](#) [POLITICAL](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: AMB. MINIKES' MEETING WITH OPPOSITION PARTIES

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In an April 25 roundtable in Almaty, Amb. Minikes heard the views of opposition politicians on Kazakhstan's bid to become the chair of the OSCE in 2009 and the current state of play with regard to respect for human rights and democratic principles in Kazakhstan. Participants did not think that Kazakhstan deserved to be selected as CiO; some argued that the decision should not be made until after presidential elections in December 2005, as the opposition would bring the country into compliance with OSCE standards. All thought that the GOK was pursuing the OSCE chairmanship as a way to advance its own interests rather than from a desire to improve its respect for OSCE principles. They told Amb. Minikes that the GOK's record on human rights and democracy issues was worsening. One opposition representative asked for the OSCE's help in establishing dialogue with President Nazarbayev. Summing up the conversation, For a Just Kazakhstan presidential candidate Zharmakhan Tuyakbay called on the U.S. and the EU to act to encourage the GOK to conduct fair presidential elections. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) During a visit to Kazakhstan to discuss the GOK's bid for the 2009 OSCE chairmanship, Ambassador Stephan Minikes held a roundtable discussion on April 25 with Zharmakhan Tuyakbay, For a Just Kazakhstan's presidential candidate; Bulat Abilov and Oraz Zhandosov, co-chairs of True Ak Zhol; Alikhan Baimenov, chairman of Ak Zhol; Asylbek Kozhakhmetov, head of Alga DCK ("Ahead, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan"); Petr Svoik of recently-dissolved Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK); and Serikbolsyn Abdildin, head of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK). All participants except Baimenov are members of the For a Just Kazakhstan (FJK) electoral bloc and support Tuyakbay's candidacy. The Ambassador and POEC chief (notetaker) also participated.

Kazakhstan's OSCE Bid

13. (SBU) In response to Amb. Minikes question of why the GOK was seeking the chairmanship of the OSCE, Tuyakbay indicated that the main motivation was to escape criticism. He claimed that for the past four or five years, the Kazakhstanian government had been waging a propaganda campaign within European institutions to give the impression of progress on democracy. The GOK sees what Tuyakbay called "constant criticism" from the OSCE and the U.S. as a potential threat to its economic and political status. It thinks that if it becomes CiO, it can deflect such criticism. Amb. Minikes noted that the CiO is held to an even higher standard than other members and could therefore expect to face greater, not less, scrutiny.

14. (SBU) Tuyakbay asserted that the GOK's propaganda campaign had already produced results; despite the worsening human rights situation, "OSCE criticism has declined." He described ODIHR's assessment of the 2004 parliamentary elections as relatively mild. Acknowledging the strong U.S. PC intervention on April 14 regarding amendments to the Kazakhstanian election law, Tuyakbay claimed that President Nazarbayev signed the legislation the following day as a signal that input from the international community was unwelcome.

15. (SBU) Amb. Minikes explained that the U.S. believes that it would be beneficial for Kazakhstan to succeed in its bid for the CiO, but not under conditions that would make a mockery of OSCE criteria. He also noted that as the OSCE does not have a strong secretariat, the country holding the chairmanship plays a crucial role in the organization's success or failure. To be an effective chairman, a country must have a large, well-trained corps of diplomats; it must be willing to spend 12 to 15 million; and the Foreign Minister must be prepared to devote over half his time to OSCE issues. Amb. Minikes also pointed out that Kazakhstan's CiO candidacy could come under uncomfortable scrutiny during possible Helsinki Commission hearings on the Hill.

16. (SBU) Zhandosov noted that Nazarbayev son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev, Kazakhstan's ambassador to the OSCE, was the primary advocate of the CiO bid. Although Nazarbayev and Aliyev are not personally close, they are political allies. Baimenov

claimed that the CiO bid is a GOK tactic to gain time, by arguing to the West that they will take steps to reach OSCE standards after the presidential elections; in reality, he claimed, the GOK had no desire to confirm to OSCE standards.

17. (SBU) Abilov added that he fully supported Kazakhstan's bid for the CiO, because he was certain that Tuyakbay would win in upcoming presidential elections and implement the reforms needed to make Kazakhstan a worthy chairman. He added that if the presidential elections, which he expected to take place in December 2005 rather than December 2006, were as flawed as the 2004 parliamentary elections, the opposition would have to "restrain people from going to the streets." Zhandosov and Baimenov echoed Abilov's assertion that the elections would take place in 2005. Zhandosov urged that the CiO issue not be decided until after those elections; if Tuyakbay wins, "this will be a different country. If Nazarbayev resorts to falsification, the result will be mass protests and violence."

18. (SBU) Abdildin said that although he would like to see Kazakhstan succeed in both its CiO bid and its quest to join the UNSC in 2010, the state did not yet meet "the demands of the people or OSCE standards" and was therefore not yet worthy of either goal. Svoik attributed the GOK's question for the OSCE chairmanship to a desire to fool the OSCE and the Kazakhstani people into believing the country was actually democratic. He called on the U.S. to push the GOK for serious political reforms this year.

Kazakhstan's OSCE Commitments

19. (SBU) Amb. Minikes asked participants how they assessed the GOK's record on adhering to its OSCE commitments. Kozhakhmetov painted a bleak picture, noting that DCK founder Galymzhan Zhakiyanov remains in custody; the Parliament is taking steps to limit freedom of speech, assembly, and political association; the GOK is attempting to close several newspapers, including Respublika, Soz, and Zash Alash; and the GOK had requested the arrest of Respublika editor Irina Petroshova in Moscow. He echoed Tuyakbay's comment that Nazarbayev's signature of the election law amendments one day after the PC intervention was a signal, and added that Nazarbayev had similarly signed the extremism law two days after international organizations criticized it. Kozhakhmetov criticized the OSCE for failing to speak out on the liquidation of DCK.

110. (SBU) Zhandosov echoed Kozhakhmetov's assessment, noting that since the fall the GOK had increased the pressure on the opposition, independent media, and NGOs. He predicted that the trend will intensify, as Nazarbayev realizes that he cannot win reelection without disabling the opposition and resorting to falsification. Zhandosov criticized the OSCE Center in Almaty for failing to speak out on the election law amendments. He stressed that the OSCE should use the July Parliamentary Assembly in Washington as an opportunity to give a "correct assessment" of the situation in Kazakhstan and push the GOK in the "right direction." Kozhakhmetov noted that all the Kazakhstani delegates will be from pro-presidential parties and will therefore give a distorted view of the situation.

111. (SBU) Zhandosov added that For a Just Kazakhstan had attempted unsuccessfully to establish a dialogue with the GOK; in a March 29 announcement, they had proposed a series of steps to prevent a repeat of events in Kyrgyzstan: adoption of a new election law that meets OSCE standards; the appointment of new members of the Central Election Commission and all subordinate local commissions; the release of Galymzhan Zhakiyanov and all others charged for political reasons; an end to repression of the mass media; and review of the results of the fall Mazhilis elections. Zhandosov noted that President Nazarbayev had not responded, and asked if the OSCE could play a role in facilitating dialogue.

112. (SBU) Baimenov claimed that Nazarbayev and his associates are betting on the fact that in their bilateral relations with Kazakhstan, OSCE members place greater emphasis on energy and counterterrorism cooperation than on human rights issues. Amb. Minikes replied that while at

times strategic interests prevail, President Bush had spoken out clearly in his inauguration speech when he said that our "national interests and our beliefs are now one." Baimenov

said that he plans to visit Brussels in May or June to highlight the real situation in Kazakhstan and to ask EU members which OSCE they want to see in 2009: one controlled by Kazakhstan, Russia, and the other signers of the Astana declaration, or one in which the human dimension is as important as security issues. He stressed that the GOK must take steps to reform before the next presidential election; nothing would be done afterward. Baimenov told Amb. Minikes that he had proposed to ODIHR director Strohal during the latter's January visit that the OSCE develop a quarterly roadmap for Kazakhstan on human dimension issues. Amb. Minikes noted that the OSCE had never worked with a member state in that way before, but that this was a possible attractive approach to helping Kazakhstan convince participating States of its commitment to putting OSCE principles into practice.

13. (SBU) Abdildin reminded Amb. Minikes that Kazakhstan had never conducted an election or a referendum that met OSCE standards. He criticized the OSCE's assessment of the 2004 Mazhilis elections as being too mild. Abdildin predicted that the upcoming presidential elections would result in additional serious violations. He called on the U.S. to tell Nazarbayev, who had celebrated his 15th year in office the previous day and was seeking a fifth term, that he has been in power long enough.

View of Events in Kyrgyzstan

14. (SBU) Abilov asserted that events in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan all reflected the desire of people to live in a normal, prosperous country with free elections. The violence in Kyrgyzstan was instigated by Akayev's people and the mafia in order to provoke instability. Abilov drew a parallel between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, noting that in both countries "the state policy is corruption." Baimenov observed that acting Kyrgyz president Bakiyev had been forced to establish relations with Nazarbayev out of economic necessity.

The Bottom Line

15. (SBU) Speaking for the group, Tuyakbay said that the opposition in Kazakhstan asks the U.S. and the EU for only one thing: their best efforts to convince the GOK of the need to conduct fair presidential elections. The opposition is confident of their popularity and their ability to run the country effectively. They need the help of the West only to ensure that presidential elections are fair.

16. (SBU) Comment: As always, some of the opposition's claims were exaggerated. We doubt, for example, that President Nazarbayev rushed to sign the election law amendments in response to the U.S. statement in the OSCE PC. Given Nazarbayev's high popularity ratings it is also unlikely that the opposition will win upcoming presidential elections, as Abilov predicted. We also think Zhandosov's criticism of the OSCE Center regarding the election law amendments was unfair, given the volume of controversial legislation currently under consideration; the Center was in fact in the process of organizing a public discussion of the election law amendments when they were signed so quickly by President Nazarbayev. End comment.

17. (U) Dushanbe minimize considered.

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